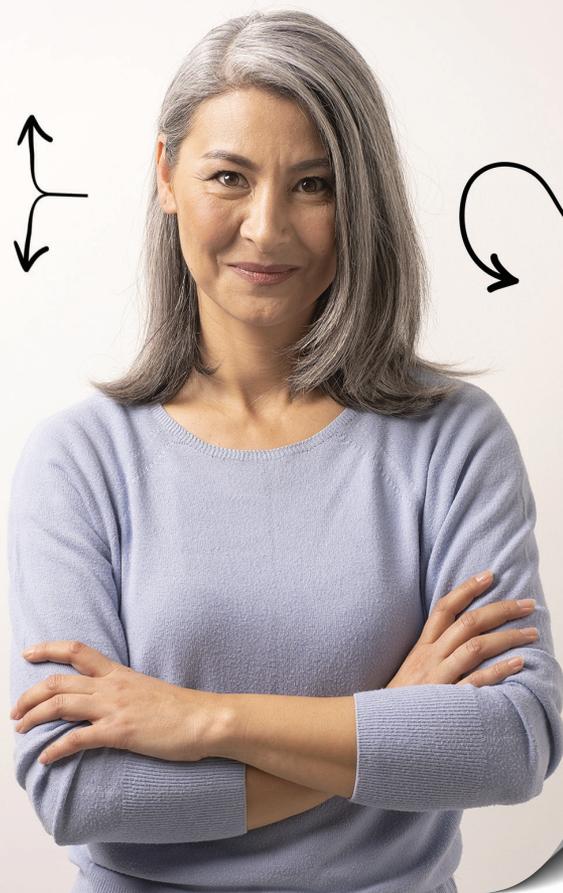


**Guy Claxton, Jann Robinson,
Rachel Macfarlane, Graham Powell,
Gemma Goldenberg, and Robert Cleary**

Foreword by Michael Fullan

POWERING UP YOUR SCHOOL

**The Learning Power Approach
to School Leadership**



**FREE sample
extract**

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Contents

Introduction

Chapter 1. Getting the Bug

Chapter 2. Learning Power: The Facts at Your Fingertips

Chapter 3. Getting Buy-In: Onboarding All the Stakeholders

Chapter 4. Creating a Staff Culture of Learning

Chapter 5. A Language for Learning

Chapter 6. Targeting Pedagogy: The Design Principles of
Learning Power Teaching

Chapter 7. Beyond the Classroom: Changing Structures and
Practices on a Wider Scale

Chapter 8. Making It Stick: Building in Sustainability

Chapter 9. Evidencing Progress and Progression

Chapter 10. Connecting to the Wider World

Chapter 11. The Odyssey: Leaders' Personal Journeys

Appendix: A Self-Assessment Grid for School Leaders

References and Further Reading

About the Authors

Chapter 1

Getting the Bug

The LPA is, like all educational approaches, a moral business. It derives from a set of value judgements about what we think is “better” – what outcomes of a child’s schooldays are to be judged more desirable than others. If you think it is all about getting as many as possible into “top universities” (and we are not really bothered about the rest), that’s a value judgment. So is the desire for “all our children to be happy”. In particular, the LPA rests on a vision of what we want young people to be like when they leave our schools (whichever phase of schooling we are concerned with). We don’t want them to be greedy, glib, smug, or dishonest (whether they end up as prime minister of the country or not). We don’t want them to be cowed, incurious jobsworths. We would prefer them to be inquisitive, adventurous, honourable, kind, and resilient, for example. Or we would like them to be disposed to think clearly and debate respectfully. So whether the LPA appeals to you depends on where your heart is. And whether you want to lead a successful LPA school depends on your clear and unswerving commitment to those heartfelt values. Without it, you won’t get going. And without it, you are more likely to be despondent or lose faith when things don’t go smoothly first time. From passion comes grit and determination. Remember Machiavelli’s honest appraisal of the leader’s task:

There is nothing more hazardous to undertake, nor more uncertain of success, than to be involved in the bringing about of a new order of things. For the reformer will have as enemies all those who have done well under the old order, and only lukewarm defenders and supporters in those who would profit by the new. This lukewarmness arises partly from timidity, and partly the incredulity of people who do not readily believe in anything new until they have seen it with their own eyes.⁴

In this first chapter, we are going to share with you the stories of how some school leaders came to that commitment; why they decided to embark on the slow and demanding process of developing a robust learning-powered

4 Paraphrased from Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, tr. George Bull (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 19.

culture in their schools. This journey, as you will see, often starts with an itchy dissatisfaction with the status quo: perhaps a feeling that there has to be more to a 21st century education than the current obsession with grades, tests, and university or college entrance. Sometimes that itch is scarcely felt until it is activated by a chance conversation, a magazine article or a TED Talk, a professional development seminar, or a poignant event at school. And then you become receptive to other sources of information about how it might be possible to scratch the itch. The LPA journey starts with the personal recognition that “there has to be a better way”, and with a sense of (cautious) optimism that such a way can be found. Without that whole-hearted commitment from the school principal, it is unlikely that anything like the LPA will take root and flourish.

Obviously, not all of the stories we tell will ring a bell with everyone. Schools vary enormously in their starting points, and we are all at different stages in our own educational journeys. But we hope that some of them will fire you up and encourage you to take the next step. In truth 21st century education depends on it!

Jann’s Story

Jann Robinson is principal of St Luke’s Grammar School in Dee Why, a suburb of Sydney. St Luke’s is a non-selective, independent school, serving families from the area around the northern beaches of Sydney. As you might expect, many of these families are well off, and being near the famous Manly beach, there is something of a laid-back atmosphere in the neighbourhood. Here is Jann’s account of how she got the bug about the LPA:

Making the decision to go with BLP – our preferred version of the LPA – has been the outcome of a long personal journey. It has been the culmination of all the experiences I have had in my years as a teacher and in leadership roles.

My pathway to leadership has been through pastoral care. I have always had a commitment to the well-being of students, and a fundamental belief that if we look after this then the academic results will follow. This commitment reflects a

Powering Up Your School

number of experiences. I was particularly affected by the suicides of two of my high school students, one in 1999 and the other the following year, while I was a year coordinator in a previous school. Both students were bright and yet this did not prevent them feeling despair. It set me on a path of wanting to work out how to make students more resilient to the pressures they would inevitably face in life. What could we do that might promote resilience and what does it take to make a person flourish, not just at school but in their lives beyond it? These two questions have stayed with me long term, shaping my work. I began, in that school, to design pastoral care programmes for my students, with an explicit emphasis on resilience.

In 2001, I became the dean of students for Years 7–10 in a different school, where I had overall responsibility for the welfare programmes. At this time I came across Art Costa's Habits of Mind framework, which instantly resonated with my own beliefs. I felt that this really was a way to build resilience in the students. I introduced the habits into the pastoral care programmes – but I couldn't get any real traction with them. Upon reflection, there just wasn't enough regular exposure to the habits for the students to really internalise and develop them. Perhaps if I had been able to get them into classrooms more it might have worked. I was also finding it hard in that role to feel that I could have any real impact on the school. And in some ways this dissatisfaction gave me the push I needed to look at becoming a head.

In 2005, I arrived as principal of St Luke's Grammar School with great plans, but there were so many other issues to be addressed, so I couldn't just leap straight into building a "Habits of Mind" school. In retrospect, I think I was right to take my time. To lead a culture change programme you must have a foundation of trust with the staff. At St Luke's, for various reasons, that foundation didn't exist, and I had to devote the first few years of my headship to building it.

By 2013, when I had been the head of St Luke's for eight years, I was still looking at how we might do better for our students. I'm not even sure if I knew clearly what "better" would look like at the time, but there were a number of things in play which were making me search for answers. For example, we were seeing a number of high-achieving kids from our junior school who

were not coming through to the senior school because there was a feeling in the community that we weren't good enough academically. In trying to address that concern we focused staff professional development around a range of themes, one of which was Carol Dweck's work on growth mindset. We wanted to get teachers to explore the idea that all students are able to learn, and we spent time on differentiation to try to overcome the underperformance of our more academic kids. While we did see some improvements, it was hard going.

There was a lot of pushback from teachers at being asked to change their practice, partly because there was a culture of blaming the students for any underperformance. They were saying that it was the students' fault that they were so passive, and there was a general attitude that kids growing up near Sydney's northern beaches were too "laid back" and simply could not be roused to work hard. So when Year 12 students did poorly in their mock High School Certificate exams, staff tended to complain that they were "really hard to motivate" and "just couldn't pick themselves up from any disappointment with their marks". In addition, I was aware of evidence that, even when they did do well in the university entrance exams (Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR)), students from our type of school often dropped out.

While all this was swirling around in my head, I heard a colleague present on BLP, so I bought both *Building Learning Power* and *The Learning Powered School*.⁵ It sounded good, but I left them sitting on the bookshelf for about six months. In mid-2013, when I had some study leave, I finally got around to reading them. I can't really describe my reaction. It was as though this was what I had been searching for all my teaching career. I think it was seeing resilience featured so prominently in the model that excited me. But it was more than that: it just resonated with all the things I had read previously, and its foundation in neuroscience added to my buy-in. I remember thinking about how it aligned with Howard Gardner's book *Five Minds for the Future*.⁶ The 4Rs of BLP – resilience, resourcefulness, reflection,

5 Guy Claxton, *Building Learning Power: Helping Young People Become Better Learners* (Bristol: TLO Ltd, 2002); and Guy Claxton, Maryl Chambers, Graham Powell, and Bill Lucas, *The Learning Powered School: Pioneering 21st Century Education* (Bristol: TLO Ltd, 2011).

6 Howard Gardner, *Five Minds for the Future* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

Powering Up Your School

and reciprocity (or learning relationships) gave me four out of Gardner's five minds, and the fifth – his "ethical mind" – could naturally be added through a fifth R, "restoration", reflecting our school's Christian foundation.

I remember sitting in the education faculty library in Cambridge, reading both books and planning out the strategy for how we would do it. I believed I could get buy-in from the staff by promising them four things: a unified approach to professional development; an answer to the problem of students' passivity as learners; a solid foundation in neuroscientific research; and a promise that we would, as a whole school, be totally committed to this and only this for five years. I was excited by the idea that the BLP framework would be for every student in every classroom. Critically, not only would it make them powerful learners in school, but it would also develop the dispositions that they needed in order to be confident and well-rounded people. For me, the LPA has always been bigger than school learning. If we could develop the dispositions that would enable our students to meet academic learning challenges, these same dispositions would allow them to meet life's challenges too. It is why I am so passionate about it and want to give it as a gift to each and every student. It is about who they are becoming, and giving them the attitudes they need to flourish: to be resilient; to know what to do when they don't know what to do; to work with others; and to be reflective about themselves.

Before we go on to our second story, take a moment to reflect on how Jann's journey towards the LPA is similar to or different from your own.

Wondering

Which bits of Jann's story resonated with you, and which did not?

Did the fact that St Luke's is an independent school colour your reading?

Have you had any experiences that shocked you into thinking hard about your educational values and priorities, like the suicides of Jann's two students did for her?

Concerns Over Existing Ways of Doing Things

We have seen a range of *concerns* that made these school leaders receptive to something like the LPA. Jann's background in pastoral care made her sensitive to issues of *student well-being and mental health*. She was on the lookout for ideas about how to help her students become more emotionally resilient and better able to cope with stress. Gemma and Robert had concerns about how to give their students the kind of attitudinal "polish" that children from more privileged backgrounds seem to have.

Others have expressed concerns about the *narrow academic focus* of the curriculum. For example, we spoke to three senior teachers – Jonny Spowart, Lee Breskeen, and Rebecca Archer – at Heath Mount School, a fee-paying but academically non-selective preparatory school in the south of England. English prep schools often take their students up to the age of 13, preparing them to take a high-stakes academic test called the Common Entrance, on the basis of which they may or may not be accepted by the high school of their choice. Jonny told us:

We've been concerned for some time that [a curriculum focused on this test] didn't suit a lot of our children, so we have been on the lookout for something that would provide a valuable education for the whole child, for all our children, to balance the emphasis on the high-stakes test for the most academic.

In contrast, some school leaders come to the LPA by way of a concern over their students' lack of academic attainment. Jann was worried by St Luke's reputation in the local community as not very high-achieving. She, along with many other principals, is concerned by student *apparent passivity* and lack of ownership of their own learning. Lorrae Sampson, principal of Nowra Anglican College in New South Wales, Australia, said:

My students really need to take more accountability for their own learning. They need to understand that they are key in their learning journey, rather than sitting placidly in classes waiting for teachers to provide them with information. I believe that teaching students about how they learn will help them develop the necessary skills

Powering Up Your School

and abilities to understand each lesson better, give them the skills to transfer their learning to other situations, and create a better classroom environment in which students will be able to focus on their learning more effectively.

We heard similar concerns about the appropriateness of conventional educational methods for students at the lower end of the achievement range. Tessa Hodgson, head of Oaklands Primary School, near Heathrow airport in West London, had been working with children with SEN and/or SEND, across the London Borough of Ealing. Like Lorrae, she was dismayed by the passivity of many such children. She told us:

After spending three years as a local authority advisor for SEND, I was very concerned by the results of the 2009 Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) report carried out by the UCL Institute of Education into the effectiveness of teaching assistants, especially on the development of children with SEND.⁴ I had seen it with my own eyes; children in classrooms all over Ealing displaying signs of “learned helplessness” as they waited for their dedicated one-to-one teaching assistants to “help them learn”. But, in my opinion, the DISS report did not go far enough. Teachers and SEND coordinators were delegating responsibility for teaching these children to teaching assistants because they themselves were not sure how to teach them successfully. In addition, senior leaders were being forced by government policy to focus on hitting data targets, so these very low attaining children were not a key concern for them. And, on top of that, teacher training was not providing enough support.

I read widely to try to find a way to break through. David Mitchell's learning theory, in his book *What Really Works in Special and Inclusive Education*, touched a nerve as it explained why children with low self-esteem and self-belief do not engage in learning.⁵ Reading about metacognition in Guy Claxton's *Building Learning Power* and John Hattie's *Visible Learning* seemed to show me a way of teaching that could empower all students.⁶

4 See Peter Blatchford, Anthony Russell, and Rob Webster, *Reassessing the Impact of Teaching Assistants: How Research Challenges Practice and Policy* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2012).

5 David Mitchell, *What Really Works in Special and Inclusive Education: Using Evidence-Based Teaching Strategies* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2008).

6 John Hattie, *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2009).

Powering Up Your School

I was excited to take on the interim headship of Oaklands in September 2014 because the school had already implemented some BLP ideas. However, when I arrived, I found that children with SEND were not my only concern. I realised that I needed to ensure that BLP was embedded in the whole-school ethos, with systems and practice that supported it, before it could successfully impact on children's learning ... and so my journey began!

Jane Bellamy, head of Leigham Primary School in Plymouth, in South-West England, also stressed the value of the LPA for children from disadvantaged communities:

That's why the LPA is so important, because aspirational families are probably giving their children some of the LPA's attitudes and beliefs – for example, “bettering yourself through hard work” – at home, whereas the kids from non-aspirational families desperately need to get those attitudes and habits of mind from school. We need to stimulate their curiosity – to get them interested in the world – because they might not be getting that at home. For instance, we trained our children to use Visible Thinking routines such as “See-Think-Wonder”, in which we get them to look carefully at a puzzling picture, think about what might be going on, and then come up with a good question to ask. For some of our children, even this little technique made a big difference. It gave them a structured way of exercising their curiosity and imagination, and it was a real shift for them. We led them deeper into the “thinking zone” – maybe without them even realising it. Some school communities might not need this kind of induction – but they would probably benefit from a focus on some other of the LPA's learning habits.

Another worry that we have encountered was over students' high levels of extrinsic rather than intrinsic motivation. They were only interested in the grades that they were getting for their work, and seemed to have lost any interest in learning for its own sake. For example, Mark Fenton, head teacher of Dr Challoner's Grammar School in Amersham, Buckinghamshire, England, told us:

As a high-performing school, the margins for increasing academic achievement at Dr Challoner's were pretty limited, but the opportunity to think about learning outcomes that stretched beyond school – the kinds of things that BLP talks about – were significant. In particular, we were finding that although our students

Powering Up Your School

were by and large bright, and appeared driven, they were often very extrinsically motivated. They were learning for the grades, and not for the pleasure of digging deep into a new subject or stretching their understanding. And we came to see, looking through the lens of BLP, that we might be able to shift that mindset.

We heard repeated concerns about whether schools were doing enough to prepare their students for life beyond education; in particular, for the challenges and opportunities of the globalised, digitalised world that they are going to inhabit. Jonny, Lee, and Rebecca at Heath Mount told us:

We were also very conscious of how the big wide world is changing – especially the world of work – and of how our children were going to need to become very flexible and agile to flourish in that world. They are really going to need to be 21st century learners. And a purely knowledge-based curriculum doesn't, by itself, give the children the requisite qualities.

When we asked Simon Buckingham Shum, then chair of governors at Bushfield School – a junior school for children aged 7–11 on the outskirts of Milton Keynes, a large town in the East Midlands, England – what he saw as the core purpose of education at Bushfield, he said without hesitation:

It's our job not just to help children master literacy and numeracy but to prepare them for a very turbulent and complex world. We are failing if we don't prepare them with the skills they need to cope with uncertainty; to cope with differing perspectives; to cope with working with different kinds of people; and to ask good questions. Our children are at a very crucial age. We need to get those skills right into the DNA of the way our children think and learn – before it's too late.

You can hear the passionate concern in Simon's choice of language. It is not surprising that Bushfield is a pioneer of BLP. Interestingly, Simon is now professor of learning informatics at the University of Technology Sydney, Australia.

Dissatisfactions with Existing Ways of Doing Things

We found that the LPA tended to look like a promising approach to those who had been disappointed with other purported responses to their concerns. In particular, earlier approaches to learning to learn, or the teaching of “thinking skills”, seemed – for many of the school leaders who responded to our survey – not to have hit the spot. We saw how two senior leaders at Wren Academy, Gavin Smith and John Keohane, had had disappointing experiences with these earlier approaches. So did Gemma Goldenberg at Sandringham, though she was quick to acknowledge the value of some of these pioneering efforts in quickening her own interest in the nature of learning, and in how teachers might help children to become better learners. One of the problems seemed to be that treating learning to learn as a “subject”, to be taught separately from “normal lessons”, didn’t work very well.

Many of our interviewees told us that, when they finally encountered the LPA in one guise or another, they had been looking for something more infused, more coherent, and more long-term than what they had met so far. They were not interested in chasing the latest fad. You’ll remember Gemma talking about her quest for something that would coherently underpin the variety of initiatives taking place in her school, each of which seemed useful, but which lacked an overarching rationale. Robert Cleary reflected:

I think we sometimes suffer from a short attention span in education. We expect new initiatives and strategies to have an immediate impact – and if they don’t, they get discarded and we go looking for the next “magic bullet”. But I’ve learned that creating a team that has stickability and persistence is essential to building an LPA school. You need advocates who will constantly remind everyone why we embarked on the LPA, what we are going to do with it, and how we are going to use it to achieve our aims.

Mark Fenton, head teacher at Dr Challoner’s, told us:

I was beginning to look around for what was “out there” concerning learning in general. I found lots of different approaches, but nothing

Powering Up Your School

that really made coherent sense, nothing which excited me ... And then I met Graham Powell at a conference. We got chatting and it sounded as if BLP might be the kind of thing I had been looking for. I arranged for Graham to come in and talk to my SLT, and his approach landed very well with them. That was an important test: if I couldn't "sell it" to them, there was no way I could hope to get the whole staff on board.

Lorrae Sampson at Nowra Anglican College said:

I am sure that the students will reap the benefits. But this may take a while to see ... The commitment to the LPA is for the long haul; it is not just a rapid fix.

Several leaders told us that they were looking for something that would help to bind different bits of the school together into a more coherent whole. You'll remember Gavin Smith saying that he liked being offered a coherent language for learning, and the consistent approach that had to be taken by everyone in the school. Similarly, the team at Heath Mount sought something that would bind the different age groups together more tightly. They said:

We had a concern about the fragmentation that had crept into the school. It had been organised into four "bands" – the pre-prep (with children aged up to 7), and then the lower school, the middle school, and the senior school – and each had rather gone its own way. So we were looking for a philosophy or a vision that would help us join up the dots, and secure an overview of the children's development and progression across the whole school. When the head came back from a conference enthusing about the LPA, it seemed to tick all of those boxes, and our ears pricked up. It seemed like a philosophy that the whole school could get behind.

Critical Events and Encounters

There were often critical incidents at school that strengthened our leaders' resolve to go looking for that "something more". We've seen how Jann Robinson was powerfully moved by the suicides of her bright students. Robert Cleary and Gemma Goldenberg were both galvanised by the experience of seeing an academically able girl not get a place at a selective

Powering Up Your School

school because she lacked the additional attributes of articulacy, reflection, and collaboration.

Sometimes the critical event was an encounter with an idea that “clicked”. Remember Robert reading *New Kinds of Smart* and being hit by the idea that intelligence wasn’t a fixed commodity, but was something that teachers could – and should – aim to strengthen? Rachel Macfarlane was struck by listening to a lecture. She said:

I first heard about the LPA – in the guise of BLP, as it was then – in 2003 when I attended a conference at which Guy Claxton was speaking. I remember how fresh, logical, clear, and articulate the presentation was; it made perfect sense! And how powerful the multitude of glimpses into the classroom practice of BLP teachers given were; I wanted to know more because I could see that it worked.

She went on to explain how the LPA opened her eyes to the wider and deeper potential of an approach to teaching which she was already pursuing in her own subject:

As a history teacher who had regularly attended Schools History Project (SHP) conferences and taught the SHP GCSE syllabus for many years, I was very familiar with – and had long been convinced by – arguments around the power of a skills-rich, rather than purely knowledge-led, approach to the curriculum. I knew the importance of supporting students in developing learning skills such as empathy, curiosity, questioning, and linking in order to become strong historians. I had seen first-hand that students become more effective and powerful historians – better able to cope with the discipline at A level and beyond – when taught how to interrogate evidence, analyse provenance, and see links and themes over time and between time periods and continents, rather than study eras in disjointed and unconnected chunks, as I had done at university. I was in my first headship at the time, and sitting listening to Guy, I could see that the way in which I taught – and had guided others to teach – was the way in which, as a school leader, I should be supporting staff to develop learners across the entire curriculum.

Often, an important step on the way to buying into the LPA has been a visit to another school that is already using the approach, and seeing it working on the ground.

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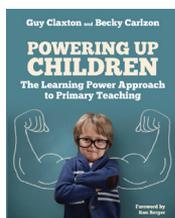
Illustrates in detail how leaders can successfully embed the Learning Power Approach (LPA) in their school's culture and empower teachers to deliver its benefits to their students.

The LPA is a way of teaching which aims to develop all students as confident and capable learners – ready, willing, and able to choose, design, research, pursue, troubleshoot, and evaluate learning for themselves, alone and with others, in school and out.

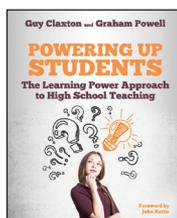
This approach also affords a clear view of the valued, sought-after outcomes of education – developing character strengths as well as striving for academic success – which underpin everything in the school: the curriculum content, the structure of the timetable, the forms of assessment, communication with parents, and the pedagogical style of every member of staff.

The school leader's job, therefore, is to provide direction and signal the standards aimed for in all these different aspects of school life – and *Powering Up Your School* sets out a detailed explanation of how this can be accomplished. It distils into a series of illuminating case studies the lessons learned by a wide range of school principals who have successfully undertaken the LPA journey and presents a variety of practical strategies geared to enable school leaders to make a positive impact on the lives of both their staff and their students.

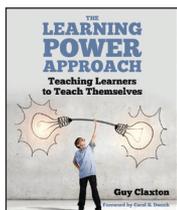
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